

Sunstar Spotlight The Team-based Approach to Care

A SUCCESSFUL TEAM HAS ONE HEARTBEAT



INTRODUCTION

As we learn more about the link between oral health and systemic health, many dental teams are developing unique programs and opportunities to assist their patients in achieving good oral health.

The exemplary professional teams in our field that deliver specialized care deserve to be recognized as well as the opportunity to share what is working in their offices.

Sunstar Americas is searching out these dental teams and will report on what makes a practice unique in its provision of treatment and how a team effort achieves the best outcomes for patients. With the answers to these questions we proudly focus the Sunstar Spotlight on dental teams making the extra effort.

This month we are paying tribute to the dental team that has developed a successful program for their patients by mastering the art of interoffice communication. We are all aware of the challenges associated with personalizing treatment requirements for each patient. Read on to learn about the specialized skills this dental team has developed for their patients' success.

—Jackie L. Sanders, RDH, BS
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Photos: Patrick Pfister

THE MORNING HUDDLE is the cornerstone of the team-based care provided at Davis Dental Center, Louisville, Ky. It provides the forum where a roadmap is drawn that guides office staff through a full day of patient care. Successful treatment here is not an accident, it is meticulously planned.

Carol Logsdon-Brenner, RDH, BS, begins the conversation for each huddle 45 minutes before the day's first patient arrives. She had been in dental hygiene practice nearly 30 years when she was hired in 2007 by Rachel Davis, DMD, who at the time had been in practice only 2 years. The new dentist's openness to fresh ideas struck a chord with her as she listened throughout the interview to Dr. Davis' description of the team care model she intended to establish. She knew intuitively she would be a good fit.

Logsdon-Brenner opens the flow of discussion among the huddle each morning with a review of patient information compiled by an electronic record system. In moments a comprehensive outline of an individual's medical history and insurance data takes shape so the team can use it to anticipate gaps in treatment or staffing. By practicing clear communication and planning, this dental team maintains sight of its goal to provide world class oral health care.

MORE THAN A WORK GROUP: SHARED VISION

"A culture of teamwork has been cultivated here, and we continue to work at it because we want to stay together," Logsdon-Brenner says.

The team members have become bonded by a common purpose laid out by Dr. Davis: deliver an unrivaled care experience to every patient. This vision is shared among staff members not only as a declaration of purpose but as a device to keep



the varied talents of each team member harmoniously moving in one direction.

The vision has become the common investment in which everyone from front office personnel to dental hygiene staff has taken ownership.

“It’s a matter of just wanting what’s best for the patient,” she says.

PATIENTS COME FIRST

Discovering what is best for a patient sometimes requires some digging. Though the process of gathering information and educating patients can eat up the clock, sidestepping consultations or rushing a procedure is an unacceptable notion for the teamwork model. Each corner of the practice is united by the directive to spend time enough to ensure thoroughness in patient care.

“It’s not about production,” Logsdon-Brenner says. The mindset is encouraged throughout the clinic by a dentist who, herself, refuses to scrimp on face time with patients. New patients at the clinic are typically scheduled for an expansive 90-minute appointment, which she says is rare for a first visit to most dental offices. “That’s how important it is for us to sit and get to know a patient.” Having the time to absorb patients’ medical and dental histories and conduct thorough discussions about their oral hygiene is a luxury in some practices. The willingness to invest time in understanding their patients is what she says differentiates the practice.

“Some dentists say they will do a comprehensive exam and they just whiz through it,” Logsdon-Brenner says. “In our office we do a comprehensive exam.”

The exam includes exploring a patient’s dental and medical history to create a reliable patient profile. New patients are screened for bleeding on probing, pocket measurements, and recording visible signs of inflammation. Radiographs are used to capture panoramic or full mouth views. Mobility, recession, and abfractions also are noted.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO CALL A WORK GROUP A TEAM

Communication develops cohesion among groups but does not ensure indi-

viduals act as a team. Good communication among staff members within the practice allows them to be active in the decision-making process wherever it helps deliver exemplary patient care. The vision of patient care minimizes the need for the dentist to micromanage operations throughout the office which allows the team to function more efficiently.

She knows she can save the dentist valuable time through her own keen observation that might detect anything about a patient’s condition that suggests a treatment modification. Her proactive investigation helps her gather information that supports decisions the dentist may make about the patient’s oral care as the office visit progresses.

At the Davis Dental Center dental assistants and front office staff—including the treatment coordinator—are cross-trained to help with periodontal charting. By enlisting the help of the team, a time savings is created that ripples throughout the duration of a patient’s office visit.

The dentist members of the team also pitch in to minimize charting time. “In many offices, dentists depend on their assistants to type in their clinical notes,” she says, “but our dentists want to know that their notes are clear and concise so they type in their own.

“By entering their notes electronically the clarity of our communications between dentist and staff is also improved,” she adds.





Up Close

WITH CAROL LOGSDON-BRENNER, RDH, BS

Carol Logsdon Brenner earned a Bachelor of Science and Certificate of Dental Hygiene in 1977 from the University of Louisville, Louisville, Ky. She has built a successful career within the dental profession both inside and outside clinical practice, is married and the mother of six children.

In addition to managing a full schedule at a busy dental practice she is a passionate about contributing to community service. She volunteers her time actively among the following organizations:

- **Louisville District Dental Hygiene Society and the Kentucky Dental Hygiene Association;** participates in Smile Kentucky and Remote Area Medical (RAM) Mission in Pikeville, Ky.
- **Member American Holistic Nurses Association since 2009;** on Planning Committee for the Kentucky Holistic Nurses Annual Meeting.

TEAM ROLES THAT COMPLEMENT INDIVIDUAL STRENGTHS

Taking on the role of periodontal therapist amplifies the dental hygienist's role in any practice. This expertise is particularly valuable in a practice with a high number of new periodontal patients. Logsdon-Brenner estimates that among the practice's new patients up to 33% are periodontal cases. Many periodontal patients are attracted to the practice because it provides conscious sedation. "We get a lot of people who are nervous about dentistry or haven't been to the dentist in a very long time—or ever," she says.

Though a periodontist works 2 days each week in the practice, it is Logsdon-Brenner's insight and experience that help guide the team most days. Her expertise is valued on a variety of patient care topics ranging from recommending mouthrinses to the efficacy of locally delivered antimicrobials.

Patients who come for treatment under conscious sedation usually require the support of three team members, with one person required to be present with the patient at all times. She notes some conscious sedation cases last up to a full day and consist of expansive treatment that involves scaling all four quadrants and restorative procedures. "You can fit in a lot of procedures when a patient is under conscious sedation," she says, "if they are well-planned."

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Building patient satisfaction is connected to building patient trust, and beginning each patient contact with a comprehensive exam provides an opportunity to grow the patient's trust in the dental team.

But getting the patient's buy-in to the team's treatment plan can be an ongoing process that begins by clearing two hurdles: enlisting the patient as part of the dental care team, and engaging the patient as part of the oral care treatment solution. "It's critical to get the patient involved in the co-diagnosis," she says.

She emphasizes how confidence is built through the use of clear and simple dialogue between the dental team and patients. To improve communication she also looks for clues from the patient to discover a common denominator around which she can build the discussion of diagnosis; sticking to terms that are mutually understood.

"What I've generally found is that if I tell patients that the breakdown of the tissue in their mouths is like an open wound on their arm or leg, they can relate," Logsdon-Brenner explains. "What do you do with an open wound? You keep it clean, you use antibiotics, and you prevent infection."

At a Glance

UNITING FOR EXCELLENCE

- Dentists create and record their own clinical notes, assuring accuracy.
- Front and back office personnel are cross-trained to assist in perio charting.
- A 90-minute comprehensive exam is provided to all new patients.
- Involve patients in the co-diagnosis.
- Patients are educated so they form a solid understanding of their own oral health and treatment plan.
- Encourage patients to become part of the dental team and participate actively in their own dental care.



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To illustrate the potential damage periodontal disease can cause she cites clinical research to her patients that shows when chronically inflamed tissue may cause bone loss.

Then she translates. "It's just like a fence post, if the dirt around the fence post gets washed away what happens? The fence post gets loose." While some conditions are easy to explain not all are easy to visualize. To encourage patients who might feel skeptical toward a treatment, she is not afraid to play the technology card.

"My computer sits right on my desk-top so patients can see the bleeding points. All the pockets above 3 mm show up in red, so it's pretty evident to the patient what's going on when you go over the numbers and the bleeding spots."



The time she spends building a patient's understanding simultaneously builds that patient's trust, strengthening the relationship between the dental team and the patient. Though rock solid relationships do not form overnight, they are a vital building block of the clinic's care model. She therefore follows the guidelines set out by her dentist to insure that patient and clinician have a mutual understanding about treatment.

"I've worked in offices where they do the periodontal treatment and then just tell the patient: 'Use this rinse for the next 4 weeks,'" Logsdon-Brenner says.

"I take time to explain to patients, however, that they need to use chlorhexidine because it kills bacteria for 10 to 12 hours. And, because we're trying to get 24-hour coverage, they need to use it after breakfast and before bed."

WORKING AS A TEAM EVEN WHEN SEPARATE

A hallmark of the productivity at Davis Dental Center is the ability of its individual talents to work as a team no matter where they are located. It is the consistent practices of good leadership, patience, and wanting what is best for the patient that assures teammates move independently toward a common goal regardless of whether they are shoulder-to-shoulder in the operatory

or consulting with an oral surgeon across town.

The success of the clinic's brand of teamwork is measured easily, she says, pointing to the number of referrals the practice receives from satisfied patients. "Our patients feel special," Logsdon-Brenner observes, "I think they can sense that they are in the care of a team here, and they feel cared for. This leads to a high rate of referrals for us," she says, pausing then repeating, "a high rate."

Delivering their best work to patients every day can create a heavy sense of responsibility among team members. To keep themselves energized the team is

mindful to maintain positive energy in their surroundings—reflected by tactics that range from hanging inspirational wall art to exchanging small words of encouragement in hallways.

The team has also learned that respecting the boundaries of down time promotes a vital sense of renewal. "When we go to lunch we don't talk about the office," she says. "We talk about our families or anything else, but we step away and give each other space from our work."

The strategy seems to work just fine. Even on days off from the clinic teammates will come together to work as volunteers at oral health care events locally and abroad. In February the entire Davis Dental Center team converged on the University of Louisville for "Smile Kentucky," where they provided care for underserved children who needed services ranging from sealant applications to restorative procedures.

"Even outside our office we're functioning as a team and those activities solidify that sense of teamwork we share."

She reflects on the team's accomplishments: how they have helped grow the dental practice; how they've improved oral health for so many; she thinks of the chats about dentistry she's shared with teammates across tabletops at community health fairs. All these things mean something, and Logsdon-Brenner knows it.

"We're proud of one another," she says. ■

STEPS TO A TEAM-ORIENTED MODEL:

The choice: Staff members in the dental office make a clear decision to cooperate and meet a shared objective.

Stay focused: Overcome attitudes about scope of practice or "professional turf" that sabotage teamwork. The team leader should address power issues and help individuals focus on adopting common goals of the team.

Communicate clearly: Checklists and communication protocols can be put in place that will help improve team processes and reduce mistakes in patient care.

Share information: Practices can provide a system that captures, shares and links patient data so common information is available between teammates.

Review: Collaboration for problem solving is one of the benefits of teamwork. Problems in processes or care can be discussed and resolved by bringing team members together in an atmosphere of trust to pool knowledge and observations.

Share this article with your practice colleagues to open dialogue about adopting a team approach to patient care in the practice where you work.